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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a project by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Division C to pair graduate students seeking mentors with willing mentors on different campuses. Mentoring has long been shown to provide tremendous benefits to participants, but until recently, it was felt that participants needed to be within the same department or same university. This project is designed to be a virtual mentoring community, with aspects of distance learning and mentoring. Project goals are for pairs to conduct joint research projects, for mentors to support mentees during their studies, and for mentees to ask questions about the professoriate. This project, initiated at the 2000 AERA conference, began with a formal panel discussion involving faculty from universities nationwide who had experience with mentoring. Mentors and mentees were invited to a subsequent luncheon to meet one another and discuss their interests and backgrounds. A committee was established to further develop the project, creating a Web site and a listserv to solicit mentors and mentees interested in working together. At the 2001 AERA convention, mentors and mentees will be brought together at a formal program. Mentor pairs who have been working together or who have developed relationships via the virtual community will share their experiences. (SM)

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Overview of Mentoring: Exploring Possibilities

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Abstract

Mentoring has been shown to provide tremendous benefits to graduate students who have been fortunate enough to develop a mentoring relationship while in school. These benefits are both career related – help getting published and finding a job in the field – and relationship oriented – providing support and guidance. The mentoring relationship has also been shown to be beneficial to the mentors who participate. Until recently, however, it has been felt that mentors needed to be located if not within the same department of the mentee, than certainly within the same university. This paper outlines a new project being undertaken by AERA Division C, which attempts to pair graduate students seeking mentors, with willing mentors not on their campus. The goals of the project are for mentor-mentees to conduct joint research projects, for mentors to provide support for mentees during their studies, and for mentees to ask questions about the professoriate. The project is seen as a "virtual mentoring community" and will involve aspects of distance learning/education and mentoring, two areas receiving considerable attention in AERA.

Overview of Mentoring: Exploring Possibilities

Mentoring is widely recognized by college and university personnel as a major component in developing graduate students and introducing them into the world of academia. However, many schools fail to provide adequate mentoring for their graduate students, leaving them feeling frustrated and alone. A recent American Association of Universities' (AAU) committee on graduate education cited insufficient mentoring as a major flaw if the education of graduate students in the U.S. To address this, the committee recommended strengthening faculty mentoring at all colleges and universities that offer graduate degrees (Association of American Universities, 1998). Lyons, Scroggins and Rule (1990) found that doctoral students who experienced a close working relationship with a faculty member had a fuller education that their counter-parts who did not.

"Mentoring is the process by which a novitiate person is positively socialized by a sagacious person for the purpose of learning the traditions, practices, and frameworks of a profession, association, or organization" (Brown, Davis and McClendon, 1999, p. 106). Mentoring requires faculty to move beyond their space as academic experts, into one of co-discovery, where joint projects are conducted and mentees are seen as equal contributors. Mentors have been described as coaches, kinfolk, gurus, sponsors, godmothers/godfathers, guides, sponsors, advisors, confidants, door openers, counselors, role models, and teachers (Kartje, 1996; Brown, et al.). And while no universally agreed-upon definition has been established, Blackwell (as cited in Adams, 1993) feels that mentoring is commonly seen as "a process by which persons of superior rank, special achievement, and prestige (mentor) instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate the intellectual

and/or career development of persons identified as protégés (mentees)" (p. 18). A mentoring relationship that develops between a graduate student and a more experienced faculty member for the purpose of imparting knowledge, providing support and counseling, is key to advancing the career and personal development of young professionals (Summers-Ewing, 1994).

The word mentor was first used in Homer's story, The Odyssey. Odysseus, king of Ithaca, was involved in the Trojan War. But before he went off to war, Odysseus hired Mentor to educate his son, Telemachus. Mentor thus became Telemachus's teacher, counselor and guide, things we often associate with mentors. (Brown, et al., 1999; Bruce, 1995).

Mentors fill multiple roles for the mentee. They train their mentees, facilitate a sense of success in them, give their mentees pep talks, protect them from danger, provide emotional support, educate mentees on particular subject, orient them to the various ethics, values and protocols of a given profession or discipline, develop opportunities for them to speak at conferences, and guide them through the publication process. Mentors are often involved in helping their mentees secure their first jobs, affirm their potential, orient them to the department, provide access to important information, connect them to resources, and empower them. Mentors are expected to be an advocate for their mentees, to be a confidant and friend, a sounding board who is generous with his or her time and advice. Mentors can be formal – designated specifically for the purpose of career enhancement - or informal, - someone mentees enjoy spending time with. Mentor support for the mentees psychosocial/emotional needs and their career needs is crucial for the success of graduate students (Summers-Ewing, 1994; Kantje, 1996; Adams, 1993).

Because there are so many roles for mentors to fill, is it possible for one, "uber-mentor", to fill them all? Is it reasonable to expect this of a single mentor? It seems unlikely, and there is support for the position that while one should develop a primary mentor on which to depend, the development of other "mini-mentors" is strongly encouraged. This program is one attempt at developing alternative mentors.

Although it is easy to cite the amount of work involved in being a good mentor, it needs to be stated there are also benefits. While the mentee receives advice, guidance, and opportunities for advancement, the mentor receives an opportunity to help another, and to pass on the skills and knowledge he or she has acquired (Kartje, 1996). The mentor develops an information network, gains access to a trusted advisee, and feels personal satisfaction while having someone to help manage the workload. Many feel that mentoring is especially crucial to the success of women graduate students and graduate students of color (Zey, 1984; Bruce, 1995; Brown, et al., 1999), and that is an area where mentors can truly make a difference. The mentoring relationship provides intellectual stimulation and curiosity for both mentor and mentee. The mentee masters necessary competencies, learns the norms and standards of the department and the profession, develops presentation and writing skills, learns research skills, social skills, administrative skills and technical skills necessary for success as graduate student. Mentors, meanwhile, experience a sense of pride as "their" mentees become successful.

Additional benefits for developing mentor relationships include reduced time to degrees, reduction in ABD's, a more cohesive and productive graduate student population, and the increased enrollment and graduation of underrepresented students. (Adams, 1993).

As has been the case in recent years, a number of programs were held at the 2000 AERA conference on the topic of mentoring. The topic of distance education/distance learning also attracted a great deal of attention. The mentoring project that Division C is developing is a "melding" of these two important topics. Technological changes have made it so that mentors no longer need to be in same geographic locale as their mentee. "Technology has allowed us to partially overcome time and distance. Electronic mail is the second most popular method of communication between protégé and mentor (after face to face)" (Summers-Ewing, p. 11). The Purpose of seeking mentors from both within ones department and the outside world is to provide both formal and informal mentors who can provide differing levels of psychosocial and career mentoring functions. Most mentees will develop a primary mentor with whom they are very close, as well as several other more 'specialized" mentors who share one or more areas of interest with the protégé (Summers-Ewing, 1994). As was mentioned before, the notion that one mentor can provide all of the support needed by a mentee seems unlikely. Therefore colleges, universities and associations such as AERA need to develop creative ways to facilitate satisfying mentee/mentor relationships.

The AERA Division C mentoring project was initiated at the 2000 annual conference in New Orleans. It began with a formal panel discussion involving faculty from universities across the country who have had experience with mentoring, sharing their thoughts on what makes a successful mentor. Several doctoral students also shared their thoughts on what they think makes a mentor-mentee relationship satisfying. Following this panel discussion, which allowed for questions and answers from audience participants, there was a luncheon. Potential mentors and mentees were invited to attend

the luncheon for the purpose of meeting one another and discussing their interests and backgrounds. This provided the foundation from which the mentorship project was to grow.

After the program in New Orleans, a committee was established to further develop the project. This committee helped to develop a web site and a list serve, which will initially be used to solicit mentors and mentees for the project. Mentors who are conducting research and would like to work with a mentee are encouraged to sign up, as are mentees who are looking for mentors. Mentors, who are willing to help introduce mentees into the profession, and to AERA, are also being sought. The relationships can be formal or informal, for the purpose of career-enhancement, or psychosocial support.

At the annual convention in Seattle in 2001, mentors and mentees will be brought together at a formal program and a more informal luncheon. Mentor pairs who have been working on programs or who developed a relationship via the virtual community, will be asked to share their experiences. At the luncheon additional pairing of mentees and mentors will also occur.

Mentoring has been shown to provide tremendous benefits to graduate students who have been fortunate enough to develop a mentoring relationship while in school. These benefits are both career related – help getting published and finding a job in the field – and relationship oriented – providing support and guidance. The mentoring relationship has also been shown to be beneficial to the mentors who participate. Until recently, however, it has been felt that mentors needed to be located if not within the same department of the mentee, than certainly within the same university. This project being undertaken by AERA Division C, attempts to pair graduate students with mentors,

not on their campus for the purposes of conducting joint research, and providing support for mentees attempting to break into the professoriate. The project is a "virtual mentoring community" which will involve aspects of distance learning/education and mentoring, two areas receiving considerable attention in AERA. It is hoped that this project will become an important piece of the mentoring process that graduate students need to be successful.

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